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Remarks

Executive Secretary

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STRATEGIC DETERRENCE:
REVIEWING THE FUNDAMENTALS

a speech given by

The Honorable Anne Armstrong
Chairman, President's Intelligence Advisory Board

for

The World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh

John C. Marous, Jr., President

November 5, 1985

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In a few weeks, President Reagan will be meeting the Soviet ruler, Mikhail Gorbachev. Preparing for their discussions has become a major growth industry in Washington, D. C., just as reporting and commenting on these preparations have for the national news media. The extent and vigor of all this activity seems encouraged, rather than diminished, by the fact that the exact agenda for the discussions appears still to be in the process of being shaped.

But at this forthcoming meeting, whatever else remains to be decided, the subject of strategic arms is sure to loom large.

According to Soviet propaganda, U.S. defense programs are carefully crafted by fiendishly clever warmongers. If Mr. Gorbachev believed any of that, he is probably confused by the public debate in recent months. The headlines have been dominated by the high prices paid for tiny wrenches, flying toilet seats, and nuclear-hardened coffee pots. There has also been intense argument over what to do with a submarine under the terms of SALT II--a treaty that we never ratified, that the Soviets have already violated, and that is due to lapse in a few months. And finally, what must have really rocked him, my old friend Cap Weinberger actually cancelled a major weapons program!

All this is meant in strict fun, of course. There is certainly no place for fraud or waste. The American people do take strategic arms agreements seriously. And Cap--"the Knife"--has always had a keen eye on getting full value

for the dollar.

But it can be a problem, under the pressures of day-to-day events, to keep the big picture in mind. It is also because of these events, particularly the ongoing arms negotiations, new defense programs, and the impending Presidential meeting with Gorbachev, that this is no time to lose sight of the fundamentals.

And so I think it would be well, today, to review the key elements that have shaped our defense policy over the past half-decade, the basic objectives that our current programs are designed to achieve, and their prospects for building a more secure future.

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This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the first atomic explosion. With the development of nuclear weapons, and the means to shoot them quickly around the globe, the world became a much more dangerous place. For the first time, entire societies could be destroyed with very little warning and without ever losing a battle.

In short order, the whole basis of the national security problem had changed drastically.

The overriding concern must be that these weapons never be used again. But that is not something that we in the United States can determine by ourselves.

Other governments, other philosophies, other psyches and personalities also control nuclear arms. We must try to

ensure that they never see an advantage in launching a nuclear attack--not in the calm of day-to-day affairs, not in the stress of crisis, not in the heat of conventional war.

And there is more. We know from history that wars have begun not only as the result of cold calculation. Mistakes of all sorts--miscalculation, misperception, mischance--have played major roles.

One is reminded in this regard of the American analyst who confidently predicted in early 1973 that Egypt would not attack Israel. The reason seemed compelling to him--Egypt knew that it could not win. A few months later, of course, Egypt did attack. The analyst insisted that his earlier prediction had been perfectly correct--after all, Egypt did not win!

And so to preserve peace we must do more than aim at deterring deliberative, like-minded people.

The message is that nuclear weapons might be used despite our best efforts and intentions. If they are, it is vital that the first use does not escalate uncontrollably. In a brilliant study he did several years before becoming our Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Fred Ikle looked into how nations had gotten embroiled in major wars. He found that, throughout history, governments have found it remarkably easy to get into wars, yet, having done so, almost impossible to stop them.

In short, if deterrence fails initially, we must have the means to restore it, to ensure that a holocaust

is not automatic. We cannot afford to think of nuclear deterrence as though it were an "all or nothing" proposition. The use of one, or a few, nuclear weapons would, like the first ring in Dante's Hell, be horrible. The use of several more, like the eight deeper rings, would be Hell's own Hell.

These, then, are the stark fundamentals of our national security problem. The fate of Americans can be determined by decisions made in Moscow, not Washington. We can influence Moscow's decisions, but we cannot control them completely. And both Washington and Moscow could possibly become victims of a terrible application of Murphy's Law--that anything that can go wrong someday will go wrong--with horrific consequences.

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The United States has approached these problems in different ways over the past three decades, as it has been persuaded by different ideas about diplomacy and technology. But our success in deterrence, of course, depends not on what persuades us, but on what persuades the Soviets. And understanding them is a daunting task. Churchill, we know, found Russian policy to be "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."

Churchill thought, however, that he might have pierced the veil. "Perhaps," he went on to say, "there is a key. That key is Russian national interest." Unfortunately, as he found out quite quickly after Yalta, Soviet views of Soviet interests are often not what we in the West think they ought to be.

Churchill was hardly the last to make this error. In many ways, SALT I and related negotiations during the 1970s tell much the same story. Americans became persuaded by a particular view of how deterrence might be achieved. They were further persuaded that this theory, called "mutual assured destruction," was the right formulation to look after Soviet interests as well.

No matter if the Soviets seemed to think differently. With persistence, it was argued, we could teach them how they should perceive their interests. Sure enough, after a few years we had an agreement, and surely that meant, at long last, that the Soviets saw the world of nuclear weapons in the same terms as we.

Or did they?

A few people in the West said they did not, and those people were right. Through succeeding years, it became ever more clear that Soviet military programs were sharply opposed to the official U.S. theory of nuclear weapons.

The American theory said there was no such thing as strategic superiority. Once we felt sure we could destroy Soviet cities with a retaliatory strike, there was no point to building more weapons. Building "too many," in fact, would make us more insecure, because the Soviets might think we were threatening their capacity to retaliate. They would then build more weapons, we would have to respond, and a dangerous arms race would have been started.

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That was the U.S. theory. In practice, Soviet nuclear forces relentlessly got larger, and larger, and larger. The Soviets built bigger nuclear weapons, more different kinds of nuclear weapons, more reliable and more effective nuclear weapons. They not only rejected American theory, they also ignored American practice. As Harold Brown testified to the Senate when he was Secretary of Defense, "When we build weapons, they build; when we stop, they... continue to build."

We might consider the years from 1967 to 1979 to be "the SALT era"-- the time from when the negotiations on SALT I began until the draft SALT II Treaty was shelved by the Senate. During this period, according to informed estimates, the Soviets increased their arsenal of nuclear weapons more than five-fold. In contrast, I might mention, the U.S. arsenal peaked in 1967 and has decreased in numbers and megatonnage--since. Today, we have only 2/3's as many nuclear weapons as we did in 1967, and only 1/4 of the megatonnage we had twenty-five years ago.

Other Soviet programs were also quite worrisome. They worked very hard on civil defense--much more than we ever did. A separate, special effort to protect over 175,000 key party and government personnel cost them tens of billions over several years--a continuity of government program that long predated ours and is far more ambitious. They never relaxed their extensive air defense programs, investing their National Air Defense service with a precedence higher than all others except the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Ground Forces. They extended war into space long ago, testing a system to attack low-flying satellites more than a dozen years before we did. They deployed, then improved and

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extended, an ABM system around Moscow and spent billions in continuing efforts to develop laser and other "exotic" technologies to use in defense against ballistic missiles.

It is particularly instructive that their programs for defense against ballistic missiles stayed far more vigorous than ours. We signed a treaty with them in 1972 which limited the deployment of anti-ballistic missile systems. It was said at the time that this Treaty truly proved that the Soviets agreed with us on our theory of mutual assured destruction. As it turned out, the Soviets actually saw the treaty as a tool to help them win the strategic competition. By signing it, they protected their ability to attack our ICBM's. At the same time, they could press relentlessly on their own extensive and varied programs for strategic defense, while those of the U.S. withered.

The result is that the Soviets today enjoy formidable options for deploying widespread ABM defenses that are not matched by the U.S. The whole thing was rather like the Hollywood producer and the starlet who both went to the altar, he for matrimony, she for alimony--the two sides entered the agreement on divergent strategic assumptions.

How divergent were they? Enough that the Soviets were quite willing to violate the treaty by building a huge radar at Krasnoyarsk, in Siberia. Of course, we made provision for verification. But verification can only help us find violations; it cannot prevent them. I find it particularly chilling, but starkly revealing, that the

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Soviets went ahead with building that radar knowing full well, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it could not long remain hidden from the U.S.

So, did the Soviets agree with the earlier American theory? Hardly. They, much more than we, took seriously the possibility of a "day after." They trained and equipped their forces, and protected their leaders and key industries, accordingly. Their outlook, to say the least, consistently reflected a thoroughgoing determination to build forces to fight and win wars under many different possible circumstances--even nuclear.

In short, the Soviets rejected the American theory that security could come from mutual vulnerability. From their point of view, they had a better theory--the Americans would stay vulnerable, while the Soviets would not.

This story, and the many additional chapters that I have not recounted here, is of course now quite familiar. It was one of the many ways during the "SALT era" that we thought we knew about Soviet interests--and we were wrong. The U.S. was also wrong in its rosy expectations about the effectiveness of trade, visits, and conversations in building peace, and wrong again about the power of international declarations to make the Soviets more inclined to observe basic human rights.

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On these and related subjects, the United States seemed to have reverted to the diplomacy of an earlier, and to our

eyes simpler, day. Sir Harold Nicholson could then recommend this advice to British diplomatists when dealing with certain governments: "Do not waste your time in trying to discover what is at the back of [their] minds. . .concentrate all your attention upon making quite certain that [they are] left in no doubt whatsoever in regard to what is at the back of your mind."

Nicholson's counsel may have had its place in an earlier world. Today, there could hardly be more dangerous advice for Americans trying to order their nuclear relations with the Soviet Union. What is at the back of the Soviet mind counts a great deal indeed. When we have ignored it, or assumed that we could simply convert it to our way of thinking, our security has suffered.

As Chairman of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, I have to tell you that we still know far too little about Soviet thinking on issues of nuclear war and peace. How do they assess our strengths, their own, and the overall condition of the strategic balance? What security objectives have they set, and how do they hope to achieve them? What conditions would they see as offering realistic prospects for building a stronger basis for peace? Can they, in fact, think in such terms? And if not, what pieces of their thinking can we use to influence them in the right direction?

The nature of the differences between the Soviet and American views, and the reasons for them, are critical subjects for American intelligence and defense planners.

But I raise them here to emphasize their implications for American efforts in deterrence and negotiations.

After all, the issue is not, as budget-cutting Senators are fond of asking our military leaders, whether we should want to trade our military posture for the Soviet one. Instead, the issue is whether, in light of the Kremlin's way of thinking, we can reasonably expect our defense posture to influence the Soviets in the ways we hope. The events of 1940, after all, proved that French confidence in the strength of their Maginot Line was fully justified. There was a great error, however, in their theory of what the German reaction would be to it. The Germans simply went around it.

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I would say, then, that there was at least one signal accomplishment of the "SALT era." Namely, we began to see the importance of understanding the minds of our adversaries. Doing so led, inevitably, to changes in American policies.

The first order of business had to be extending and strengthening the American deterrent. We had to ensure that our capabilities had the desired effect on the Soviets in their own terms. That meant that we needed forces that the Soviets would understand clearly as being capable of denying Soviet plans and objectives.

Vulnerabilities had to be corrected, lest they tempt Soviet escalation in some future crisis. Our staying

power had to be improved, so that the Soviets could not plan to disarm us effectively by merely outlasting us. And we had much to do to ensure that our forces are at all times controlled by properly constituted authorities, even during a nuclear war. That, in turn, compelled major investments to ensure that our leaders can communicate with our forces under all circumstances. We also had to sharpen and re-shape our striking power.

All of this is included in the President's Strategic Modernization Program, now in its fourth year. As it progresses, our security grows stronger, and not only because deterrence is stronger. Modernization has also made it less likely that an American President might find himself compelled to escalate a nuclear confrontation for fear of losing important operational capabilities--the "use it or lose it" problem. It has brought us forces that can stay on alert for protracted periods without in any way being on a "hair trigger." It has brought us safer weapons, with lowered risk of accident and increased assurance that they will destroy only their precise targets. And it has brought us better warning and response systems, so that the President has more time to seek confirmation, review his options, and make prudent decisions.

Strengthening our deterrent involved other forces as well. The Soviet deployments of SS-20 missiles compelled us to modernize NATO's nuclear forces. And our conventional forces had to be strengthened, to make it less likely that

the President would have to consider the possible use of nuclear weapons during a crisis.

These programs, and the many others involved, have all come a long way in the past four years, and they must continue. There are sure to be recurring arguments over particular spending priorities, and funding for some major systems will probably lurch along from year to year. But the fundamental case is so compelling, the imperative so clear, that the basic effort must be continued. There is simply no substitute for a strong deterrent force, and there can be no relaxation from striving to improve it however we can.

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Still and all, even our best efforts along these lines cannot lead us out of what remains, at root, a terrifying situation. The kind of deterrence that we've known for a generation leaves us, like Sisyphus, condemned to an unceasing struggle of the damned against relentless opposing forces.

In March of 1983, the President pointed the way out of that struggle, toward getting the national security rock planted securely on top of the hill. In establishing his Strategic Defense Initiative, the President took concrete steps that, for the first time, could bring real and fundamental changes in the basic issues of national security in the nuclear age.

In his speech, the President challenged and focused the creative energies of the American scientific and defense communities. Not all supported the President's initiative

quickly or without reservation--and that is as it should be. It takes time to examine and digest proposed changes in basic habits of thought and parlance that have developed over twenty-plus years. Some, even when they have taken this time, will conclude that the global terrorism of mutual assured destruction still offers a safer path to peace. Others, using an almost primal intuition, will be convinced that "it" will not work, whatever "it" may eventually prove to be. And there will be no lack of serious debate over directions, dollars, programs, and priorities. But all this, as most often happens in our system, is most likely to ensure that our future defenses will be both technologically robust and endorsed by the public over the long term.

The President's speech also provided an occasion for creative energies of a different sort. Senators in public hearings grilled Defense experts as to what would happen if the Soviets attacked while the President was in the shower. And, of course, there was the "Star Wars" nickname, which conjured up images of R2D2 in orbit, armed with a giant laser flyswatter.

Others were more earnest, but to me nearly as silly. Some continued to turn common sense inside out, by explaining endlessly how strategic defenses will make us less secure. For their part, the Soviets, with their patented straight faces, insisted that U.S. strategic defenses were actually an aggressive program to attack the Soviet Union preemptively.

And then there were the specialists who asserted credentials in both economics and strategy by carefully suggesting that SDI

might turn out to be acceptable, if, after a long period of research, it seemed possible to build a system that all by itself is both cost-effective and fully survivable. If we depended on those criteria for all our decisions, I don't think we'd even have Swiss Army Knives.

The Soviets, on the other hand, don't think that SDI is silly at all. To be sure, they'll take whatever propaganda line they think will best stop SDI dead in its tracks. But they do so because they, above all, know what this program means.

First, with the U.S. getting serious about defenses, the Soviet approach to deterrence--we stay vulnerable, they do not--comes up empty.

Moreover, the Soviets know that strategic defenses will be part and parcel of the U.S. military posture overall. They will have to judge the effectiveness, and survivability, of the U.S. defenses within the total context of strengths and vulnerabilities on both sides. No single point of comparison, this measure with that countermeasure, can determine an absolute outcome here, any more than it can for tank battles or, for that matter, football games. Indeed, the Soviets probably know this better than we do. They have always evaluated the merits of their programs and weapons in a broader strategic setting, and they know that even imperfect, "leaky" defenses, can make it very difficult to design an attack plan in which they can have high confidence.

Finally, the Soviets take "Star Wars" very seriously because they have terrible problems with the American approach

to technology. The American scientific and defense research and development communities do not work like the Soviet ones do. Namely, the Soviet approach works very poorly; the American one quite well. Confronted with remarkable challenges, the Americans cannot be counted on to fail. And while they are about it, they will likely develop systems that reduce our dependence on nuclear weapons--for defenses, and for offenses, in space and on earth. And, as the U.S. solves more and more pieces of the strategic defense puzzle, the Soviet approach to strategic power becomes less and less competitive. As that happens, their own strategic calculations are likely to drive the Soviets, whether they want to or not, toward joining the U.S. in forging a new relationship on the basis of mutual assured survival.

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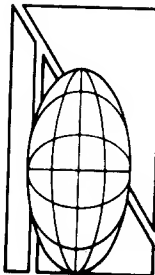
So, where do we stand? Fundamentally, I think, on a solid basis for a more secure future.

True, there is tough going ahead in Geneva. But we have the right objectives, and we have a better understanding of the Soviet approach. Sooner or later--the sooner, the better--the Soviets will see that they can only gain by getting serious. We are prepared to negotiate with them, to work jointly toward a more stable and safer strategic future. We are not prepared to yield them continuing strategic advantage, nor will we accept rhetoric and posturing in place of serious arms reduction.

At the same time, we are embarked on programs that could transform the current horrifying basis of strategic deterrence. The dictates of our political heritage, our military history and moral values, all compel us to seek security

by protecting people, not by holding them hostage.

And we will continue to lower the risk of catastrophe by building the strength of our deterrent posture. Most importantly, we are taking care to ensure that it deters the Soviets, rather than Americans transfixed, looking in mirrors.



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